

Security, Peace, and the Future of the Peace Process: An Address by the Israeli Prime Minister

May 18, 1998



Brief Analysis

Security and Peace: "...We are now discussing in Washington a critical passage to complete the closing of the circle of peace around Israel. The territorial aspects of this discussion are very important—the knowledge of what land is vital and what land is less vital for our security... First, a small discussion on the vital link between peace and security... We are told all the time if Israel has peace, then it will have genuine security. But that, unfortunately, is circular reasoning for the simple reason that in the unreformed, undemocratized Middle East that we live in, the only peace that can endure is a peace that can be defended. In the Middle East, peace is based on security and the ability to deter war. The aspects of peace that we are all so enamored of—the idea of normalization, economic exchanges, people-to-people contacts, cultural contacts and so on—those are an added bonus. They can be taken away at any time because of the nature of the regimes around us. They are not built into a process that is irreversible. They can be reversed at any time by the whim of a ruler. Normalization is a bonus, but it is not the foundation of peace. The foundation of peace in the Middle East is security, because there is no democratic constraints on the aggressive intentions of rulers and intentions can change as the balance of power changes."

Territory and Security: "From day one of its inception, Israel has faced three threats: the threat of conventional warfare or ground attack, a ground invasion that could destroy the state; the threat of non-conventional attack, which has been increasing in the last decade, of missiles carrying their non-conventional warheads; and the threat of terrorism. The most important move to peace that made peace possible came in the Six Day War, when the most important and immediate threat, the threat of a ground invasion that would destroy the country, was removed... If we keep Israel's territorial buffer, we can do two things. We can prevent the first threat, and we can reduce significantly the third [terrorism]... That is our concern today. What we seek is... a western buffer—small, but necessary for a future defense against terrorism from the Palestinian entity—and a larger eastern buffer... We need a western buffer against terrorism, an eastern buffer against ground attack. This doesn't not solve in any way the problem of overflying missiles, I want you to know. We need other solutions to that..."

The Failings of Oslo: "...Oslo was meant to advance the peace without hurting security. And at least in the first two and a half years, it failed to do so. The deal was we give the Palestinians land, and they fight the terrorists from within that land. [This] may have been seen and is still seen by some to have been miraculously successful, but the reason I'm standing here as the prime minister of Israel was because it failed miserably, because 250 Israelis, the equivalent of 10,000 Americans, died in terrorist actions that emanated from the areas given over to the Palestinians as part of the Oslo Accords. And that happened because the Palestinians failed or refused to fight the terrorists within their midst. In fact, those terrorist organizations grew and mushroomed under the Palestinian Authority. The deal that Yitzhak Rabin signed with Yasser Arafat, the deal that he presented to the Knesset, was not kept. And the Israeli people elected me to say: 'Fix the peace. Fix the peace.'"

"What we have tried to do in the last two years, is to correct that imbalance... [T]he first thing [the Palestinians] must do is fight the terrorists—systematically, consistently, day in, day out... And fighting this terrorism also means

fighting it with public education. It means for one thing, annulling that covenant of hatred. We insist that the Palestine National Council will meet and shred that document to bits... I think that the important thing is that we want to see a change of attitude... This is one of the main issues that we are talking with Secretary Albright about..."

Further Redeployments: "...The territory that we're talking about for redeployment is empty of Palestinians. Ninety-eight percent of the Palestinians now live under the Palestinian Authority in the Palestinian areas... [I]n terms of the Palestinians, this is not a question of human rights; this is not a question of transferring from Israeli rule to Palestinian rule additional Palestinians. The main implication of this territory is for the defense of the Jewish state. Some of this land, I believe—some of it—is less than vital than others... But we know more or less the range of what is possible in an interim settlement before there is a final peace agreement and before the kind of arrangements that could be done in a permanent settlement, such as the relocation of military camps or such as the bypass roads or tunnels or bridges or other kind of investments, which take time and can only be part of a final settlement. Before all of that is done, we know what is the final amount of land that we have. We also know what we need to have in order to have assets for final settlement negotiations... We're prepared to engage in this process of redeployment, assuming there is Palestinian compliance to our basic demands. We're prepared to redeploy from additional land. But we cannot do so while compromising our security, because we know that if we compromise our security, the peace will collapse."

U.S. Role in Negotiations: "...We've been talking to the United States based on the agreements that we have fashioned with them, and the United States has made very clear, time and time again, that Israel and Israel alone must determine its security needs... This has been the mainstay of our relationship through many, many decades, and it is a mainstay of our relationship today. It is very tempting, especially for journalists, to dramatize the differences of view that Israel and the United States have on this issue. I want to dampen your enthusiasm. For fifty years, Israeli prime ministers and American presidents have had disagreements on the question of security. That is natural. These are disagreements around the dinner table in a family. Israel and the United States are the quintessential members of a family, a family of democratic nations with enormously profound common values."

"...It seems to me that the role of the United States because of its unique position, should be a role of a facilitator, one with obvious and evidence sympathies and connections to Israel, but one in which it assumes the role of facilitator and sometimes a mediator, but certainly not a role in which it assumes or takes over the responsibility of trying to establish a position of itself either in an interim settlement or in the final settlement, not because the United States does not have opinions—who doesn't have opinions when it comes to the Middle East?—but because both the moral and practical considerations of achieving a durable settlement, says that the parties themselves must come to an agreement from and within themselves. That is the only kind of an agreement that sticks and that makes any sense over time. I think this is what I would like to see the U.S. role, over the coming years because we have other peace agreements to sign as well, as you know, and it is one that the U.S. is also expressly committed to... The United States can assist, should assist, we want it to assist, and in fact, I'm talking to Secretary Albright and her team on how to assist moving this process forward. But it must be within the context of this specific American commitment which leaves the question of designating Israel's security needs—and from it, designating the redeployment—that must be left to Israel..."

"Everybody's focused right now on the extent of the second redeployment. That's the hot issue. For us, there are two other hot issues. One is reciprocity, namely, Palestinian compliance with commitments that they've given us to fight terrorism and annul the covenant, that they haven't done. And the second thing is to know is there another redeployment after this one, because we have a finite amount of area that we have designated for this process that we know will not jeopardize our security. And we must know the end of this interim process. How do we enter the final-status negotiations. That is at least as serious an issue for us as the second redeployment. We are looking at the

entire redeployment process, first, second and, most importantly, third. And it is answers to that, it is an agreement on that that we seek to have even though, frankly, according to the American commitment, we don't need to seek agreements. Nevertheless, we're talking among friends around the dinner table, trying to secure that agreement."

"...[For Israel,] there is no problem of doing the first, second and third by whatever date we can agree on. That's not important. The issue for us is not how many slices we have but the total amount that we're slicing. So when people ask us, "Well, will you do a third redeployment?" we say: "Sure. All we have to do is take away some land, or reserve some land, from the second phase of redeployment, and we'll have enough for the third." Therefore, for us, when people ask us, "What will be the process?" we say, "Let's talk about the first, second, and the third. And let's know in advance how much terrain Israel can hand over without jeopardizing its security." And if we know that, we can give an answer... If we're only asked: "We'll give so much in a second redeployment, but more is coming, and we're not going to tell you how much more. And we are still going to challenge your right to decide the third redeployment," then all we're doing is straining ourselves beyond our capacities only to invite another crisis, two, three, four months down the line. That's not very good statesmanship. If we want to get a resolution right now that is stable, that allows us to enter final settlement negotiations, talks about a final peace agreement between us and the Palestinians, then the right thing to do is to resolve this interim agreement, this disengagement agreement, by knowing how much Israel redeploys from in all three stages."

Oslo's Expiration, May 1999: "...I hope we have a disengagement agreement now, so we can move into final status negotiations. I hope those final status negotiations are completed by May of 1999. But Yitzhak Rabin used to say that no dates are sacred, and at least in the Oslo accords, that was true. None of the dates—certainly under the previous government, none of the dates were kept—none of them.

Is it possible that we will not complete the negotiations by May 5, 1999? Yes, it's possible. Does this mean that the Palestinians have a right to unilaterally declare a state? The answer is no. That would be a gross violation of Oslo. It would effectively collapse the agreement. And it would absolve Israel of any responsibilities under the agreement. It is the worst thing that could happen...

I want to say something about... the reason[why] we are opposed to a Palestinian state. It is not because we wish to govern the Palestinians. As I explained earlier, we no longer govern them today... It is because we are aware of the dangers of unbridled self-determination, or what we call a fully sovereign independent state... Such a state would pose a mortal danger to Israel... What they need a state for is to field a large army. It's to import weapons. They can't do that because right now the international passages are jointly controlled, with overriding responsibility by Israel. What they need a state for is to make military pacts with such regimes as Iraq or Iran. They can't do that because under the present circumstances, that is simply not possible. So these dangers—of having a large army, including volunteers from Arab countries, of the importation of heavy arms and non-conventional weapons such as shoulder-fired missiles that could endanger our airspace... of the danger to our water resources, forty percent of [which] are in underwater tables sitting directly in areas that the Palestinians would claim under such a state, [the danger of] alliances with radical regimes—these are great dangers... We have seen in the twentieth century that any time that demilitarization competed with sovereignty, usually, not always, but usually sovereignty won. There are great dangers there.

In any case, we have never seen a fully demilitarized state, and that is what would be needed in the small distances that are spoken about here. We don't, in short, want another Iran or another Iraq at our doorstep. And that is why we seek an arrangement that would give the Palestinians every ability to conduct every aspect of their lives with the exception of those few powers that could threaten the life of the Jewish state...

I'don't discount the right of the Palestinians to raise that claim for Palestinian statehood in final-settlement negotiations. I'm telling you what our position would be, to seek a functional solution where we would have the

powers of security, especially external security. And they would have the powers for everything else, virtually everything else, those powers that are needed for self-government absent those that could threaten Israel."

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